Water Safety Training for Babysitters and Caregivers

A free 45-minute water safety lesson for teen sitters, nannies and grandparents: bath time, hidden water at home, pools, and a missing child.

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Community groups · 45 minutes · For teens, caregivers, older adults

This lesson teaches **babysitters, nannies, grandparents and anyone who watches young children** the water rules that matter most: a hand on the baby in the bath, no water left standing in the house, eyes on the water at the pool, and **check the water first** if a child goes missing. It takes 45 minutes and works for a library, youth program, senior center or a family meeting.

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children drown inside the home every year in the U.S., and two-thirds of those deaths happen in the bathtub (CPSC).

Source: cpsc.gov https://www.cpsc.gov/Safety-Education/Safety-Education-Centers/In-Home-Drowning-Safety-Information-Center

Learning objectives

- Keep a hand on a baby in the bath at all times, and take the child along if they must step away.
- Find and fix water hazards in a home: tubs, toilets, buckets, coolers, wading pools and doors to the pool or yard.
- Follow the family's pool and outdoor water rules, and stay within arm's reach of young or weak swimmers.
- Respond to a missing child by checking the water first and calling 911 with the address ready.
- Fill out the family's water rules sheet with the parents before the first job.

Materials

- ☐ A doll and a dishpan or empty plastic tub (no water needed)
- ☐ A towel, a washcloth and a bottle to show 'everything within reach'
- ☐ Pictures or a simple floor plan of a home with a bathroom, kitchen, laundry, back door and yard pool
- ☐ Copies of the Babysitter Water Rules sheet and the Emergency Action Plan
- ☐ A pretend phone for 911 practice

Lesson steps

1 Warm-up: Where is the water? 5 minutes

Ask the group to name every place a toddler could find water in a home. Aim for at least eight: bathtub, toilet, sink, bucket, mop pail, cooler with melted ice, pet bowl, wading pool, rain-filled bin, pond, hot tub, pool.

2 Activity 1: Bath time, hands on — 10 minutes

Demonstrate with the doll in the empty tub, then have each person practice.

- Before the bath, put the towel and everything else you need within reach so one hand can stay on the baby the whole time.
- Never leave a baby alone or with another young child in or near water, not even for a moment. A bath seat or infant tub does not change this; bath seats can tip and babies can slip out.
- Doorbell or phone? Wrap the baby in the towel and take them with you.
- After the bath, drain the tub right away.
- Ask the parents if their child bathes alone. The AAP says children shouldn't bathe alone until they're at least 6.

3 Activity 2: Hazard hunt — 10 minutes

Pairs mark every water hazard on the floor plan and write the fix. Review together.

- Toilet lids down (and locked if the family has lid locks); bathroom door closed.
- Buckets, mop pails, coolers and wading pools emptied right after use.
- Doors to the yard, garage or pool kept closed and locked; tell the parents if a door alarm is off or a pool gate doesn't latch.
- No child goes outside alone where there is a pool, pond or hot tub.

4 Activity 3: Pools and outdoor water — 5 minutes

Go over the rules that apply when parents allow swimming.

- Only swim if the parents said yes, in writing on the rules sheet.
- You are the Water Watcher: phone away, eyes on the water, no other jobs.
- Babies, toddlers and weak swimmers: stay within arm's reach, in the water with them.
- Water wings and floats are toys. Use a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket if the child can't swim.
- Never put an older sibling in charge of watching a younger one in or near water.

5 Activity 4: Emergency practice — 10 minutes

Practice the two emergencies that matter most, out loud.

- **A child is missing:** check the water first: pool, hot tub, bathtub, toilet, buckets, pond. Seconds count. Then search the rest of the house.
- **A child is in the water and in trouble:** shout for help, call 911, and reach or throw something that floats if you can do it safely from the edge. Get the child out if you can do so without putting yourself in danger.
- **911 practice:** the dispatcher will ask what happened, where you are and who needs help. Read the address from the rules sheet, including the apartment number and floor.
- Call the parents after you have called 911.

6 Assessment: Quick check — 5 minutes

Ask the quick check questions below. Anyone who misses one repeats that activity with a partner.

7 Take-home

Each sitter takes two copies of the Babysitter Water Rules sheet: one to fill out with each family before the first job, one to keep. Recommend a full babysitting and first aid/CPR course.

Background for the instructor

- **Bath time.** The AAP says: never leave your baby alone or in the care of another young child in or near water, not even for a moment, even with a bath seat, because infant bath seats can tip over and children can slip out of them. Keep a towel and supplies within reach so you can keep a hand on the baby, and if you need to answer the door, bring the baby with you. See bath time safety.
- **Older children in the bath.** The AAP recommends that children not bathe alone until they are at least 6, and that young siblings not supervise them.
- **Hidden water.** The CPSC says a child can drown in as little as 2 inches of water, quickly and silently. The AAP says to empty water containers immediately after use, including wading pools and coolers with melted ice, to keep toilet lids down and bathroom doors closed. More in buckets, coolers and containers.
- **Pools.** The AAP says even if you are not swimming but there is a pool nearby, always keep children within arm's reach; if you must leave, take the child with you. The Red Cross says do not trust a child's life to another child and to avoid distractions including cell phones.
- **Emergencies.** The Red Cross says if a child is missing, check the water first, and to rescue the person without putting yourself in danger. Nemours KidsHealth explains that a 911 dispatcher will ask what happened, where you are and who needs help.

Quick check questions

1. The doorbell rings during the baby's bath. What do you do? [Wrap the baby in a towel and take them with you.]
2. Can the 8-year-old watch the 3-year-old in the wading pool while you make lunch? [No. Never leave a young child near water in the care of another child.]
3. The toddler is suddenly missing. Where do you look first? [The water: pool, hot tub, tub, toilet, buckets, pond.]
4. What will the 911 dispatcher ask? [What happened, where you are, who needs help.]
5. Are water wings enough at the pool? [No. Stay within arm's reach, and use a Coast Guard-approved life jacket for a child who can't swim.]

Going further

- The American Red Cross offers babysitting and child care courses, including an in-person Babysitter's Training course for ages 11-16, and first aid and CPR classes.
- Parents can share water safety rules for babysitters with every new caregiver.

Take-home sheet

Printable: Water Rules for Babysitters resource.aminfoundation.io/printables/babysitter-water-rules

Printable: Water Emergency Action Plan resource.aminfoundation.io/printables/emergency-action-plan

What you can do today

Print two copies of the Babysitter Water Rules sheet for every sitter, and practice saying the home address out loud as if on a 911 call. If you're a parent, fill out the sheet with your sitter before their next visit and walk them through how to supervise kids around water.

Sources

1. Infant Drowning Prevention & Water Safety: How to Protect Your Baby, American Academy of Pediatrics (HealthyChildren.org). https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Infant-Water-Safety.aspx
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3. Swim Lessons for Children: When to Start & What to Consider, American Academy of Pediatrics (HealthyChildren.org). https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Swim-Lessons.aspx
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6. Water Safety, American Red Cross. https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/water-safety.html
7. Teaching Your Child How to Use 911, Nemours KidsHealth. https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/911.html
8. Babysitting & Child Care courses, American Red Cross. https://www.redcross.org/take-a-class/babysitting-child-care
9. Preventing Drowning, CDC. https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/prevention/index.html

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